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WILDLIFE SERVICES—CALIFORNIA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in California

Every day California residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on California Wildlife Services (WS) for its expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, professional, and selective strategies to resolve conflicts between humans and wildlife.

California is a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, forests, and desert environments. With more than 33 million residents, and a population growth rate higher than the national average, human interactions with wildlife are expected to increase over time as people encroach on both agricultural property and wildlife habitat.

WS employees help California's livestock and fruit producers reduce losses from predators and birds. They address serious beaver damage to California's transportation infrastructure, crops, and other natural resources. WS also protects the lives of pilots, air passengers, and aircraft from dangerous wildlife collisions with aircraft. In addition, WS helps to protect many threatened and endangered species from other wildlife predators.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting sheep, cattle, goats, and poultry from predation
- Protecting public health through monitoring of plague, rabies, and other communicable wildlife diseases
- Protecting public safety against attacks and threats by mountain lions, black bears, coyotes, and other wildlife
- Protecting passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife
- Protecting Federal and State listed threatened and endangered species

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Georgia:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Focusing on adult territorial coyotes to manage sheep depredation
- Inducing infertility as a wildlife management tool
- Managing wildlife vectors of rabies



Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Air Travel—Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with airplanes cost the U.S. civil aviation industry more than \$470 million annually. California has many of the country's busiest airports with 900,000 aircraft providing transportation to more than 17.5 million passengers annually. Many of California's airports are located along the coast in close proximity to the Pacific Flyway.

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) continually conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to control or prevent these hazards.

Applying this scientific expertise, the California WS program provided assistance to 16 airports in 2002, including technical assistance, training, and direct operational management. On-site evaluations, as well as comprehensive wildlife hazard assessments were also completed.

Protecting Livestock from Predators—In addition to the many factors that cause economic hardships for livestock producers, predators like coyotes, bears, and mountain lions cause additional and sometimes significant losses by attacking sheep, cattle, and goats. It is estimated that in California and other Western States, about 75 percent of WS' cooperative agreements are with small farmers and ranchers. In 2000, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) surveyed California cattle producers and found that they lost 14,900 cattle and calves to predators that year, resulting in more than \$5 million in losses. NASS conducted a similar study of sheep producers in 1999 and found that they lost an estimated 17,000 head of livestock worth almost \$1.3 million. Research results suggest these figures could be 2 to 3 times higher in the absence of an effective livestock protection program.

NWRC is working hard to develop additional predator management methods. The center's research efforts on traps and snares has improved the selectivity of these tools. Pan-tension devices on traps and breakaway snares help ensure that only depredating animals are caught. Another preventative method being researched is the use of llamas as alternatives to guard dogs for protecting sheep flocks from coyotes and other predators. As these and other methods are developed, they will be provided to field personnel and producers for their use.

Protecting Threatened or Endangered Species—Habitat destruction and human encroachment are long-term threats to California's large number of threatened and endangered species. Predators ranging from feral cats to nonnative species like red foxes, and even native species like raccoons, coyotes, striped skunks, and raptors threaten these species.

During the past decade, the California WS program has been involved in a number of projects to protect threatened and endangered species. In fiscal year 2002, WS conducted projects to



protect 7 bird species, the California Red-legged frog, the salt marsh harvest mouse, and the Sierra Nevada big horn sheep, just to name a few. In nearly all cases, the projects resulted in the threatened or endangered species populations being maintained or increased.

Looking to the Future

In California, public safety has become a growing concern for wildlife managers. This is particularly true at airports. Increased travel through California's airports, coupled with a growth in the population of many bird species, have created a greater need for airport managers to deal with threats posed by wildlife.

A second issue related to public safety involves the increased need to protect people from large predators such as coyotes, black bears, and mountain lions. In fiscal year 2002, WS personnel responded to 2,676 requests for assistance where public health and safety were being threatened by wildlife. In order to ensure a fast, efficient, and professional response, however, WS must have the appropriate tools and resources.

California Wildlife Services Funding • • • • •

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

